

The Rising of the Day Star

by J.C. Philpot

The sure Word of prophecy is a light shining in a dark place, which brings conviction to the soul and leads to faith and salvation.

Scripture: Psalm 119:45, Proverbs 4:18, Isaiah 1:17-18, Hosea 14:1, Ephesians 5:13, Hebrews 13:5, James 1:23, 2 Peter 1:19

Topics: "Faith Progression", "Salvation Assurance"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches about the progression of faith in the soul, starting with the acknowledgment of darkness and the need to heed the sure Word of prophecy, leading to the dawn of a general sense of God's mercy, then the arising of the day star with a particular promise applied to the heart, and finally the Sun of righteousness shining with healing in His wings, bringing personal revelation and assurance of salvation. He emphasizes that though faith may lead to different experiences, it is the same faith working in various ways, like the eye seeing different objects or the hand touching different textures.

Transcript

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"We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto you do well that you take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns, and the day star arises in your hearts." 2 Peter 1:19

Many people are of opinion that had they lived in the times of the apostles, had they seen what their eyes saw, had they witnessed the mighty miracles which Jesus wrought, had they heard the gracious words which dropped from His lips, they would, they must have believed in Him. But do we find that this was the case with hundreds and thousands who witnessed His miracles, and heard the words, which fell from His lips? Did not the eyes of multitudes gaze upon Him as He bled upon the cross; and did a sight of His body there agonizing move or melt their hearts? Did not this piteous sight rather inflame their minds with frenzy, and draw forth from their hearts the scoffing cry - "Let Him come down from the cross, and we will believe Him." "He saved others; Himself He cannot save?" So with us here present - had we seen the same sights, heard the same words, and witnessed the same miracles, we would have been as hard as they, as unbelieving as they, and as blaspheming as they, unless the Spirit of God had raised up faith and feeling in our souls.

In this chapter Peter tells us that his endeavor and desire was that those to whom he wrote might be able after his decease to have the things he set before them always in remembrance; and he tells them that he and his brother apostles "had not followed cunningly devised fables, when they made known unto them the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came to Him such a voice from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount." That which Peter's ears heard, Peter could not doubt; and that which was commended to his conscience, he felt, knew, tasted, handled and enjoyed for himself. But though he might communicate to us a description of what he heard, he could not communicate to us the same faith, which he himself felt. He might assure us in the clearest terms of what he himself had experienced, but he had no power to convey into our hearts a similar experience, nor to raise up in our souls a similar faith to that which he enjoyed himself; and therefore he goes on to say, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto you do well that you take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns, and the day-star arises in your hearts."

What does he mean by saying, "We have a more sure Word of prophecy?" Does he mean to say that "the Word of prophecy" is more sure than the voice which he heard when he was with Christ in the mount? Does he intend thereby that the oracles of God, which we have received from our fathers are more sure and certain than the very voice of God which he heard with his outward ears when God the Father bore witness, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased?" Not more sure to him, for nothing could be more sure than that which his eyes saw, and that which his ears heard; but more sure to us; because however certain he was of what he heard, however strong was his faith, however indubitable was his evidence, he could not convey to us the same certainty which he had himself; he could not set before us the same sight; he could not present to our ears the same sounds; he could not raise up in our hearts the same faith; and therefore however sure and however certain the word was to his own mind which he heard when he was with Christ in the heavenly mount, yet being unable to convey to us the same evidence which he enjoyed himself, he adds, "We have a more sure Word of prophecy."

Now what does he mean by this "Word of prophecy?" Does he mean the mere prediction of future events, of which we have such ample records in the Word of God? Does he intend to say that the predictions of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and so on, were more sure and more certain than "the voice which came from the excellent glory?" No; he does not mean by the word "prophecy" the mere prediction of future events; but he means that declaration of the mind of God, which is in the Scriptures of truth. The word "prophecy" signifies originally not a prediction of future events, but a speaking in behalf of God; so that a prophet is one, not so much who predicts future events, as one who speaks for God, who is the ambassador of God, the interpreter of God, the mouthpiece of God; and as God has been pleased to record His mind and will in the Scriptures of truth, it has come to pass that the Scriptures of truth have become the Word of prophecy.

But how do they become a more sure Word of prophecy? They only become a sure Word of prophecy when they are brought home and applied with power to the heart. Standing in the bare letter they have no power; as long as they are merely couched in so many letters and syllables they have no effect; but when the incarnate Word makes use of the written Word - for they both bear the same title to manifest the truth of God - and brings it home with power to the soul, then, and then only, does it become "a sure Word of prophecy" to those whose hearts He opens, as He opened Lydia's, to receive it.

Now if we look at our text, we shall find marked down in it the successive steps of faith in the soul; and it will be my object in the following discourse, if the Lord shall enable me to speak aright, to trace them out. For you will observe that faith always exists in the living soul; and faith will never leave its abode until faith is turned into sight, and hope is changed into enjoyment. Therefore we read of strong faith and weak faith; and that the Lord is the author of faith and the finisher of faith; implying that in the very beginning of the divine life there is the implantation of faith, and in the very end of the divine life there is still the existence of faith, until that faith is turned into complete fruition; so that in this life we stand by faith, walk by faith, live by faith, and everything which we receive we receive by faith. It is therefore incumbent on every one who would be mouth for God to trace out the successive steps of this work of faith in the soul, that the people of God may have some inward testimony that they are possessors of that living faith whereby the soul shall be saved.

I. Now the first step of faith is, "a taking heed to the more sure Word of prophecy; whereunto you do well that you take heed." This sure Word of prophecy is spoken of as "a light that shines in a dark place." As I said before, this sure Word of prophecy is not the mere prediction of future events; but it is the general revelation of the mind of God in the Scriptures of truth; and therefore we read lower down that "no Word of prophecy is of any private interpretation; for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit," implying this, that whatever God has recorded and revealed in His Word of truth is the common property of the children of God. It is not of any private interpretation; that is to say, it is the public property of the whole family of Jehovah.

For instance, we read in Psalm 51 David's confession of sin; but David's confession of sin applies to every soul that is condemned on account of sin. So that when David says in that sweet Psalm, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin - against You only have I sinned and done this evil in Your sight; purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow," and so on; all this is of no private interpretation, as though none but David made these confessions, poured out these complaints, and sank with these heart-sinkings - but the interpretation, in the Spirit's hands, is common to the whole family of God who feel guilt, and is the public property of all living souls upon whose conscience guilt is charged by the Holy Spirit.

So when the Lord said to Joshua, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you," it was a promise specially given to Joshua; it seemed to be confined to that individual; it appeared to be of private interpretation, as though Joshua and Joshua alone was entitled to that promise. But we find the Apostle Paul bringing forward this promise as the general property of the whole church of God - "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as you have; for He has said, I will never leave you, nor forsake you." Heb 13:5 "He has said." To whom? To Joshua; but in saying it to Joshua, He said it to the church of God; in giving Joshua the promise, He gave that promise to every soul that needed, with Joshua, His help - that feared with Joshua to be forsaken - that needed with Joshua His sustaining hand; and therefore this private promise to Joshua was not of private interpretation, but when applied by the blessed Spirit, suits every living soul that is placed in similar circumstances with the individual to whom that promise was addressed.

Now this it is which makes the Scriptures such a wonderful book - that the feelings there described are the feelings of God's family; the experience there written is the experience of Christ's people; the trials there set forth are the trials of all the elect throughout the world; and the promises there made are the promises which "are all yes and amen in Christ Jesus to the glory of God," for the whole assembly and church of the First-born. This makes the Scriptures such a wonderful book - that when the Holy Spirit is pleased to open

it up, He makes that to be ours personally and individually which is in the Word, and seals that with holy unction upon our hearts which we read in the Word of God as belonging to others.

No prophecy, then, of the Scripture is of any private interpretation, but the common property of the family of God; and "holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit;" the Holy Spirit so influencing and working upon their minds as to make them bring forth out of their hearts that which would be suitable to the whole family of God. When Job, for instance, poured out his piteous complaints, he was speaking, though he might know it not, for the children of God to the remotest time. When Hezekiah on his sick bed vented the breathings and desires of his troubled heart, he was, unwittingly perhaps to himself, expressing the wants and pining complaints of every languishing soul. When the bride in the Song of Solomon tells her love-tale, and whispers the affection of her heart into the ears of the Bridegroom, she was pouring forth the affectionate feelings of every soul brought to love Jesus.

The Holy Spirit Himself moved all the sacred writers so to speak and write, that He might make the Word of God to be a treasure-house of consolation, the grand reservoir of holy truth, out of which He might take sometimes promises, sometimes rebukes, sometimes consolation and sometimes instruction, as He might see fit; according to the testimony which God Himself has given of the Scriptures, that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Well, then, here is "the sure Word of prophecy;" that is, the mind of God revealed in the Scriptures of truth. This is compared to "a light shining in a dark place." This dark place is the heart of man - and a dark place it is; and the light shining in the dark place is when the Spirit of God pours His own heavenly light into the dark heart. The Spirit of God works by the Word of God. He makes use of the Scriptures of truth, by means of these blessed Scriptures to communicate light. There is no light in the Scriptures themselves - they cannot teach a man to profit, that being God's prerogative. I might compare the Scriptures to the moon; the moon has no light in herself, but she borrows all her light from the sun. Blot out the sun from the sky, and the moon would cease to shine.

Or I might compare the Scriptures to what James compares them Jas 1:23 - "If any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass." Here the Scriptures are compared to a mirror, or looking-glass. But light must shine upon the glass. Of what use is a looking-glass in a dark night? It reflects no image; it presents to you no likeness; you discern not your features therein; it might be nothing else but a naked board, as far as any reflection it gives of your face. But let light come into the room, or let the sun rise and shine upon it, and your countenance is reflected therein. So with the Word of God; it is ineffectual until the Spirit shines upon it; and when He shines upon it, He casts at the same time a ray of light into your heart; and as He shines with this two-fold ray, first upon the Word and then into your soul, He reflects from the Word your very image, and you see yourself just as you are, clearly portrayed.

Now this is the light shining in a dark place - the light of God's truth shining into your dark hearts. This becomes a sure Word to you; faith is raised up in your heart to credit what God has revealed; the shining in of this light into the dark place causes you to believe; and you, believing in the light, which is thus come into your dark heart, receive the Word of prophecy as a sure Word.

Now sometimes this word "prophecy" signifies the preached gospel 1Co 14:24 - "If all prophesy, and there come in one that believes not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all; and thus are the

secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth." So lower down he says, "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If anything be revealed to another that sits by, let the first hold his peace. For you may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all be comforted."

Now from the effects, which the apostle here ascribes to prophecy, we find what this prophecy was. There was in some cases a discovery of the secrets of the heart, which is under preaching; according to those words in Hebrews, "The Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." How often have you, under the preaching of the Word, had your very heart turned out, your inmost feelings described, the secret workings of your mind brought to light, and you were forced to fall down and acknowledge that God was in the man who so turned out your heart of a truth?

So again we find that prophecy is spoken of as a way of instruction. "For you may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn." Here was instruction communicated agreeably to that which is said of the Scriptures 2Ti 3:16, that they are "for instruction in righteousness." "And that all may be comforted" - implying that the preached Word is for the consolation of God's people, the building them up on their most holy faith, the administration to them of comfort through the manifestation of Christ therein.

The first step of faith, then, is to believe in the light, which shines in darkness. That is, the Word of prophecy, the Word of inspiration, the Word spoken by the mouth of one of God's servants, or read in the Scriptures of truth, comes as a light into a dark heart, and shining as a light into this dark place, the conscience takes heed thereto. The first step of faith, then, is to "take heed to the sure Word of prophecy."

This "sure Word of prophecy," then, makes manifest the counsels of your heart, brings to light the secret workings of your hypocritical nature, tears away your false props, pulls down your lying refuges, stamps beggary and bankruptcy on all you are and have, writes Tekel on all your attainments, and makes you poor indeed. You may seek to resist the light, and fight against it, and try with all your might to oppose these powerful convictions in your conscience; but the light has shone into the dark place; and the light having thus shone has stamped an impression never to be erased; it has left its footsteps behind; it has engraved a record never by human hand to be blotted out, because it has come with discernment, with conviction, with power, with feeling, with divine authority; as the fingers of a man's hand wrote upon the wall of Belshazzar's palace.

It is then from the shining in of the light into this dark place that the soul is brought to take heed. It never took heed before; all warnings previously were slighted; all reproofs previously fell upon a disobedient ear; all exhortations to flee from the wrath to come never sank into the heart; all preaching, however pleasing to the natural ear, left no weight with it, caused no impression, produced no conviction, wrought in the soul no sense of misery, guilt, helplessness and woe, because light had not shone into the dark place.

But light shining into the dark place produces that conviction whereby a taking heed results as the necessary consequence. It is like a fish in whose jaws the hook has been entangled; it may struggle to get away, but the angler will draw it to land. It is like a wounded deer, into whose flank the arrow has been shot; it may seek to bound away with the herd; it may try to rub the arrow out of its side by getting among the trees of the park; but the arrow sticks; and as the arrow sticks the blood flows; and as the blood flows, the strength becomes exhausted; and as the strength becomes exhausted, the poor wounded deer sinks

and drops in its place. It must take heed to the arrow, because the arrow is in its flank.

A living soul cannot but take heed. Shall not a sick man take heed to his sickness? Shall not a wounded man take heed to his wound? Shall not a man with a broken leg take heed to his fractured limb? He cannot but take heed. And why take heed? Because it is forced upon him, wrought in him. The painful feeling will cause attention; it is no matter of choice, it is no matter of free-will, it is no matter of uncertainty, whether he will take heed or not. He is compelled to take heed by the painful feeling, which has been produced. Most men are like a man in a consumption; they take no heed to their disease. "O, I have only a cough," they say; "when the spring comes, I shall soon get better. I have but a little pain in my side. When that is gone I shall soon get well." They take no heed to the real nature of their complaint, and so they drop into the grave. And why do they take no heed? Because it has never been forced on them, that they are sick; they are deluded, cheated, deceived by the very nature of the disease, and thus sink into the grave before they are aware. So it is with thousands of professors. They are in a consumption; they have the plague in their very vitals; they have the disease in their very souls. But they know it not, and they go dancing down to the grave.

But to what does the living soul take heed? Why it takes heed to the "sure Word of prophecy" - to what it teaches, to what it reveals, to what it makes manifest; according to those words Eph 5:13, "Whatever does make manifest is light;" and therefore it takes heed to what the light makes manifest. It begins then to take heed to what God has spoken; for instance, God has said, "The soul that sins it shall die." It takes heed to that. God has said, "Cursed is every one that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." It takes heed to that killing sentence. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." It takes heed to that word of condemnation, which cuts off thousands. "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." It takes heed that "without faith it is impossible to please God." It takes heed to God's warnings, to the denunciations of His wrath against sin, to all that He has threatened to pour out upon the ungodly.

It takes heed, also, to the workings of its own heart, to the base corruptions that spring up from the bottom of that deceitful deep, to the filthy passions of its depraved nature, to the suggestions of its own unbelieving mind, to the horrid thoughts that it sometimes has of God. It takes heed to its own impotency and helplessness, to its beggary and insolvency, to its inability to think or speak or do a single good thing, to the utter poverty of the creature, and to its thorough powerlessness spiritually to live unto or please God.

Again; taking heed to the "sure Word of prophecy;" the soul takes heed for the most part to all that God speaks against it, and cannot yet take heed to that which God in His Word speaks for it. Therefore when the soul in this state is brought under a heart-searching ministry, it takes heed to the path, which this heart-searching ministry casts up. It takes heed to the distinctions that are drawn between a work of the flesh and the work of the Spirit. It takes heed to the evidences, which are insisted upon as belonging to gracious souls. It takes heed to the nice distinctions, which an experimental minister of truth draws between letter faith and spiritual faith. It takes heed to the narrow line which he traces out between the righteous and the wicked, between those that fear God and those that fear Him not. It takes heed to these things as a sure Word. It feels that it is not following "cunningly devised fables." It is no longer a matter of indifference whether it hears them or not; but it believes on the sure testimony of God that in these things is life or death.

Many poor, tried, tempted souls are often questioning with themselves whether they have a grain of faith; and why are they questioning it? Because they cannot find in their hearts that which faith is said in the

Word of God to perform. They cannot believe in Christ; they cannot receive the atonement; they cannot rejoice in Jesus with "joy unspeakable and full of glory;" they cannot triumph over the world; they cannot find the operation of that faith which works by love, and purifies the heart; and therefore, not being able to trace in their hearts the love, joy and peace which the Scriptures speak of as the fruits of faith, they write bitter things against themselves, and conclude that they have no faith.

Now if they had no faith they could not feel these things. Take away faith, and you take away feeling; take away belief in the sure Word of prophecy, and you take away a taking heed to the sure Word of prophecy. Why does the quickened soul take heed? Can it take heed without faith? The taking heed springs out of faith; it is the offspring of faith, the child of faith, the fruit of faith. If I were to tell you that between here and another town, when you had got half way there was a precipice, and that you would be very likely to fall down this precipice unless you were very cautious in looking to your steps, if you did not believe my words you would go heedlessly on; but if you credited what I said, you would take heed to your steps; you would be saying every moment, "How far is it to the precipice? Is it in this direction? is it in that?" and you would be extremely anxious to know the exact spot where the precipice was. But why this extreme anxiety? Why this wary walking? Why this taking heed? Because you believe what I tell you, that there is the precipice in the road.

How then can a soul take heed to its way, to its feelings, to its secret thoughts, to God's warnings, and to the work of grace that He is carrying on, unless it has faith? Had it no faith, it would be unfeeling, indifferent, careless, reckless, carnal, worldly, earthly-minded. But it is this inward root of faith, which produces these fruits of faith; and it is because it has faith in the sure Word of prophecy that it takes heed to the sure Word of prophecy.

Do you not sometimes tremble when you sit under a minister whom you believe to be a man of God, with fear what your sentence is to be? and are you not afraid sometimes that this sentence should drop from his lips, "You have neither part nor lot in this matter, but are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity?" And do you not dread sometimes lest this word should come from his mouth to your conscience, "Bind him hand and foot, and take him away and cast him into outer darkness, that he may have his portion with the hypocrites?" What causes you thus to fear and tremble? What leads you to desire to be right? What makes you dread to be wrong? What induces you to cry to God to search and try your heart? What draws out your soul in breathings after His presence? Can unbelief do these things? Can you of yourself produce these feelings? Can the flesh bring forth these fruits? Can you at all times command this spirit of prayer and anxious desire in your soul?

Here, then, is the first step of faith - a taking heed to the sure Word of prophecy, because the sure Word of prophecy has been a light in a dark place. Now if you never felt that your heart was dark, if you never had light shining in that dark place, if you never had the Word of prophecy commended to your conscience as a sure Word, and if you never took heed to it, it is because you have no faith. But if light has shone, if darkness has been felt, if the Word of prophecy that is, the preached Word has been brought home to your conscience, and you have taken heed thereto by trying your own standing by it, by bringing your evidences to the light, that the light may shine upon them to see whether they be of God - if you have experienced these things, you have faith, aye, true faith, the faith of God's elect, though it may be in your feelings as weak as a bruised reed, and as small as a grain of mustard seed.

II. But now we come to the second step of faith. "We have also a more sure Word of prophecy; whereunto you do well that you take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns." Why surely

if a man is an unbeliever he cannot "do well;" and therefore the very expression, "you do well that you take heed," implies that a taking heed must be a spiritual gift; for nothing is good but that which is spiritual, and a man cannot do well until, as it is said in Isaiah 1:17, he "learns to do well" - until he is instructed therein by the Holy Spirit; and he does do well when he acts under the spiritual operation of Him who works in him "to will and to do of His good pleasure." He does well then when he is but the passive clay in the hands of the heavenly Potter, who moulds him with His divine fingers. He does well when he listens to the voice of his only-wise Teacher; he does well when he acts in obedience to His dictates.

The second step, then, is "the day dawning." What is this dawning? A larger measure of light in the soul; and not merely a larger measure of light in the soul, but light to produce gladness. When we are abroad before the sun rises, the first thing that strikes our mind is the gradual increase of light. We find this spoken of in the Proverbs Pro 4:18 where it is said, "The path of the just is as the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day."

Well, this dawn is, I believe, the general manifestation to the soul of the mercy of God in the face of Jesus Christ, without any particular revelation of that mercy to ourselves. Whence does the light come which gladdens our eyes when we see the dawn? It comes from the sun. But can we see that glorious orb of day? Is he not yet concealed by the horizon? And yet the rays and beams of that glorious source of light and heat come over the atmosphere, and are refracted thereby; so that though we do not see the sun itself, yet we see the rays and beams that issue out of it. So it is with respect to the mercy of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The only light that we enjoy by day comes from the sun; so the only rays of mercy ever felt in quickened souls beam forth from the Sun of Righteousness. But must our eyes see the Sun of Righteousness that they may drink in His beams? Is not the orb itself often concealed when its beams are manifest? Is not the sun itself unrisen at the very moment when we see the dawn of day? So it is with respect to the manifestation of the mercy of God in the face of Jesus Christ; that is, an encouragement is shed abroad in the heart, just as the rays of light are shed abroad in the sky; scattered gleams of light break forth upon the soul, by which it is seen that there is mercy with God that He may be feared; that there is an Almighty Savior, and that there is mercy in the mind of God towards every one who believes in that Savior.

These streaks of dawn in the sky bring indeed no personal assurance, no individual testimony of our own acceptance; but they shed abroad a sweet and blessed feeling that there is mercy to be found by every one that seeks it. It is not now all blackness of anger against sin; it is not one lowering sky of wrath, and wrath alone; it is not one dark midnight of justice, in which there is no beam whatever; but rays of light shoot across the dusky sky as the dawning day rises over creation, and they gild the soul with the scattered gleams of mercy. And yet at this time there is no individual assurance, no sure and certain testimony of the name being written in the book of life; but still there is such a general sense of God's mercy as encourages, strengthens, enlarges and comforts the soul.

Now this is an experience, which people do not often describe. They say it must be either one or the other; it must be either despair or assurance. I say it is no such thing. There is a medium state of soul - I know the feeling well in which the dark clouds of despair are banished, and yet the Sun of Righteousness has not risen. There is a state of soul in which it is encouraged to knock and pray, to seek and sue, to wait at the door-posts, to be on the watch-tower looking out for light; to be found on its knees begging for mercy, and at times to be lifted up to believe that the messenger has left the palace with glad tidings in his hands, that the vision is for an appointed time, and though it tarry to wait for it.

Now when your soul has got to this point, it has crossed the line, as Huntington somewhere says. The tail of the storm is now only upon it - the lightning has ceased to blaze, the thunder has ceased to roar; the rain still falls, the sky may still in a measure be lowering, but it is only the end of the storm; and the soul becomes settled down, waiting for some manifestation of God's individual grace and love. This is the second step in the actings of divine faith.

III. And now comes the third step, which is the day star rising in the heart. "Until the day dawns, and the day star arises in the heart." What is the day star? A bright luminous speck, different from the dawn. It stands by itself, a bright spot in the clear sky; it shines as the herald of the sun - the messenger, the sure token that he is about to rise. The day star was once hidden, as the sun is still beneath the horizon; but that bright star, that clear luminous spot, that sure harbinger of day, has arisen, and the sun will follow. This then is the third step of divine faith; and it springs out of the application of some sweet promise, the dropping into the heart of some token of love from the fountain of love, a gentle whisper from Jesus to the soul encouraging it to wait - not assurance yet; not certainty yet; the book of life with its fair leaves not unfolded yet; "Abba, Father," not shed abroad in the heart yet; love unto the Father of mercies not enjoyed in its fullest manifestation yet.

Well, but, say you, how does this differ from the state which you were just describing? It differs thus. When the day dawns it is a general light - you cannot say there is any particular spot brighter than the rest, but it is a general dawning of the light, akin to the general manifestation of the mercy of God in the word of truth. But the day star is a particular speck, a star in the east that attracts the eye, that draws to it observation; it is a bright luminous spot which shines by itself in the sky. Now here is all the difference between a general indistinct acquaintance with the mercy of God - I mean of course an experimental acquaintance and a special promise, a particular sign, an individual token, which has dropped into the heart.

But you say, Does not the application of the promise always bring with it assurance? That must depend upon what the promise is. Suppose, for instance, this promise was applied with power to the soul "Him that comes to Me I will never cast out;" does that bring with it assurance? No, it merely encourages the soul to come, and that if it comes it shall not be cast out. Or take another passage. "Ho, everyone that thirsts, come to the waters;" does that invitation bring assurance? No, it persuades the thirsty to come to the waters. Take another promise - "Come unto Me, all you that are weary and heavy laden;" does that bring assurance? No, it is an invitation to the heavy laden to come to Jesus. But how does it then differ from the general sense of mercy? Why, in the special application of the promise.

How does the day star differ from the dawn? In this way - it is in the midst of the bright sky, and yet is alone in the midst of the bright sky; it is surrounded by a halo of light, and yet it stands alone as a luminous spot in that clear light. Now so is the promise of God applied to the soul, the Word brought home to the heart with power. It is in the midst of the light because it stands up in the light of the mercy of God - but it is something more; it is a bright speck, a luminous spot in the heart which shines there in solitary beauty, distinct from, though surrounded by the light of the dawn.

If you ever had a promise of this kind applied to your soul, you have had the day star. And where does it arise? In the heart. O Peter, how ever could you have applied such a lever to overthrow all the interpreters of modern prophecy? This word "arise in the heart" cuts down at a single stroke all the interpretations of those who are looking for nothing else but the mere outward fulfillment of temporal prophecies. The day star is to arise in the heart, in the feelings, in the soul, in the spiritual conscience, in the new nature. It is to arise within a man, not outside a man - to beam spiritually, not to shine temporally - to be a pledge of

everlasting happiness, not of earthly prosperity. And therefore this expression of the day star arising in the heart shows that it is a divine blessing put into the heart, which gives light to the heart, which stands up as a luminous spot in the heart, and therefore is a foretaste of salvation in the heart.

IV. And now comes the fourth step, which is the Sun of righteousness arising with healing in His wings. This is more than the day star; it is brighter than the day star; it overwhelms the day star - it shines in its own clear light; it brings with it its own evidence; it is accompanied with its own sure and certain seal. And this is the witness of the Holy Spirit to the souls of God's people that they are born of God, the personal revelation of Christ, the individual manifestation of Jesus as the Bridegroom of the bride. The shining into the soul of the King of kings and the Lord of lords, and the betrothing of the soul unto Himself, is the day of its espousals in a wedding tie never to be dissolved. This is the fourth and last step of faith; and then comes all the trial of faith, and all the struggle of faith, and all the embarrassments of faith, and all the difficulties of faith; as Deer says, "When the pardon is signed and the peace is procured, 'Tis then that the conflict begins."

That is, begins in its intensity. It has begun before, but now it begins to be a fight indeed. It was a skirmish before, just the light troops traversing and fighting at intervals; but then the heavy troops come into action, and the battle begins indeed.

These, then, are the different steps of faith - not that they can be always clearly traced out, but these are for the most part the four successive steps of faith in the soul - the same faith, wrought by the same power, given by the same God, working in the same way, but producing different effects.

Well, but say some, how can it produce different effects if it is the same faith? My eye - to which faith is compared, as when the Lord says, "Look unto Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth" - my eye, to which faith is here compared, does it not see every object in the same way? But does it always see the same objects? I may see things most pleasant to my eye, and I may see things most painful to my eye. But do I see them in a different way? No, it is the same organ, but it looks on different objects. So faith sometimes sees painful things, distressing sights, unpleasant objects; and sometimes it sees blessed things, delightful prospects, Mount Pisgah views. It is the same faith, acting in the same way, but beholding different objects.

Faith is sometimes compared to tasting - "If so be you have tasted that the Lord is gracious; .. O taste, and see that the Lord is good." But does my tongue always taste pleasant things? Is there no bitter medicine? no wormwood and gall? no unpleasant draught to be swallowed, as well as honey, milk and wine? Yet the same palate tastes the bitter and the sweet.

So also faith is compared to the ear - "Hear, and your soul shall live; Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." But does my ear always hear pleasant sounds? It may hear sweet music - it may hear most discordant notes; yet it is the same ear that hears both. So faith may hear the thunders of the law, or faith may hear the jubilee trumpet of the gospel - but it is the same faith, as it is the same ear.

Again, faith is sometimes compared to the hand, as when it is said, "Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me;" where faith is compared to a hand. But my hand may grasp a nettle, or my hand may touch swans down; how different are the sensations! yet it is the same hand that lays hold of each. And so faith may take hold of threatenings, rebukes and cutting reproofs; and faith may take hold of love, righteousness and atoning blood; yet it is the same faith taking hold of different objects.

By these familiar illustrations we may see that the province of faith is to see, to taste, to hear, to feel; and that it is the same faith, though the objects of faith differ. Thus in these four successive steps it is the same faith that takes the first step, the second step, the third step, and the fourth step; but these steps are different, though it is the same limb that moves. I may walk, naturally, sometimes over smooth ground, sometimes over rough ground - sometimes in miry places, sometimes over the green turf. Do I need a different foot to walk on different ground? Do I need one kind of foot to walk on smooth ground, and another kind of foot to walk on rough ground? No, I walk with the same foot in both cases. So it is with faith. We walk by faith, and therefore faith will be affected, as my limbs are affected, according to the road by which I walk. If I travel in a very thorny road, my feet will be lame and sore; if I walk in a green grassy path, my feet will be in comparative ease and comfort. So faith walks sometimes in a rough and thorny path; but it is faith still. It sometimes walks in a pleasant path, in the garden of the Lord; it walks in liberty, as David speaks Psalm 119:45, supported by Christ, and in the love and blood of Christ, but is still the same faith - for there is but "one faith," as well as but "one Lord, one baptism." Faith, like its author, is not divided, but is one and the same.

Now some here present may have only got to the first step - light shining in darkness; just light enough to see and mourn over their darkness, just grace enough to feel their corruption, just fear of God enough to tremble at His Word. Well, these are taking heed; they cannot sit under dark ministers, they cannot herd with dead professors, but they are taking heed to "the sure Word of prophecy." They will come for miles to hear those men who speak with feeling and power to their hearts. They think no obstacle too great, no hindrances too numerous, to prevent them from hearing "the sure Word of prophecy." They are like Mary, who "pondered these things in her heart." They lay up the truths that they know and feel in their souls; as David says, "Your Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against You." Thus they are brought to take heed, and ponder, and scrutinize, and weigh the path in which they are walking. This is the first step, and a painful step it is when the conscience is compelled to take heed to all that passes within, and all that passes without.

Some of you perhaps have got a step beyond this; you have been lifted up in your soul by a sense of God's love in giving His dear Son, and have been encouraged from time to time to hope in His Word, to trust in His goodness, to cast yourselves at His feet, and ask mercy from Him from whom alone mercy comes. But you are tried in your minds because you have never had a promise specially given you - you are exercised because there has been no Word spoken with power to your heart; and yet you have felt faith and hope working in your souls. Well, it will come by and by; the day star will arise in the appointed time.

There are those perhaps here who have had the Word of promise, the application of some scripture with power, some love token dropped into their hearts, some sweet testimony from God in their souls. Well, you have got the day star. And there may be one or two, or a few - I know not their number - who may have seen one of the days of the Son of Man, and had the glorious Sun of righteousness arising in their souls, with healing in His wings. These are, as long as it lasts, walking in the light of His countenance, exalting and praising Him to the utmost of their power, and the utmost stretch of their faculties.

But all and each have the same faith.

Let not the strong the weak despise;

Their faith, though small, is true.

It is all from the same source - a less or greater drop from the same fountain, a smaller or larger crumb from the same loaf. They are all of the same family, as the babe in its mother's arms is the brother or the sister of the eldest of the children. And the time shall come when they shall all see eye to eye. This shall be when the Lord brings again Zion. Then there shall be no difference. They shall all sit on the same throne, they shall all wear the same crown, all see the same God, be all conformed to the image of the same Lord, all see Him face to face, and all be filled with the same glory. It is the purpose of God that there shall be differences while here on earth, but when this world shall have passed away like a dream of the night, all distinctions shall cease. All shall meet around their Father's throne, ascribing salvation to God and the Lamb.

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